

Anxiety: Looking into the Overlooked

Handout

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<http://patientinfo.nimh.nih.gov>



Outline

- What is "anxiety"?
- What parents can do to help a child who is struggling with anxiety
- Treatment: Understanding CBT and Medication
- Information about research and current research studies at NIMH

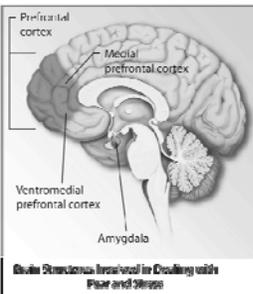
What is Anxiety

- Nervous, scared, worried
- Anxiety can be adaptive
 - Anxiety is not only a normal response, it's a necessary response
- Stress: Stress is experienced by all people – it is the innate reaction to everyday challenges or threats
- When is anxiety excessive or maladaptive?

Some Normal Fears

- Between 6 months and 3 years, some children are afraid of strangers
- Between 2 and 4 years, they may fear animals.
- Between 4 and 6, darkness, storms and imaginary monsters are common fears.
- Mysterious happenings may frighten children between 6 and 12 years.
- Adolescents fear social embarrassment, academic failure, death, and war.

How are fears acquired in the first place?



- Our minds have evolved as an early warning system to alert us to problems and dangers.
- This was useful when we were trying to avoid being eaten by predators.

When does anxiety become a "disorder"?

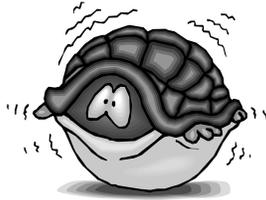
- Avoidance
- Interference
- Distress

Anxiety Disorders

- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Phobia
 - Specific Phobia
 - Panic Disorder
 - Agoraphobia
 - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
 - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Identifying Anxiety

- Extreme shyness
- Isolation in the classroom
- Hesitant to participate in social situations
- Extreme discomfort when the center of attention
- Avoid schoolwork for fear of making a mistake
- Telephone home frequently
- Absent from school (too much)
- Trouble paying attention



Identifying Anxiety

- "Blends into the wallpaper" (avoids any attention)
- Always expects the worst
- Excessive worry about upsetting others
- Asks questions continually
- Perfectionistic about work
- Excessive worry about failure
- Wiggles, is jittery, shaky, high strung, tense and unable to relax
- Lack self-confidence and seem very unsure of themselves



Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

- “Trouble catching breath”
- Stomachaches/ headaches
- Complains of nausea
- Frequent trips to the bathroom
- Tightness or pain in the chest
- Sweating
- Dizziness or light headedness
- Heart racing or beating faster than normal
- Feeling faint
- Shake or feeling jittery

Managing Anxiety

- | Do | Don't |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ■ Be sensitive | ■ Accommodate the anxiety |
| ■ Give positive feedback | ■ Single the child out |
| ■ Be consistent | ■ Excessive reassurance |
| ■ Seek additional resources | ■ Being too directive (“taking over”) |
| | ■ Over control the child and limit the development of autonomy |
| | ■ Criticize the child, thereby reducing feelings of accomplishment |

Interventions at Home

- Provide a sympathetic and tolerant environment and making some adaptations may be helpful to aid a child or adolescent with anxiety:
 - Understand the illness
 - Listen to the child's feelings
 - Keep calm and be a comforting presence during anxiety provoking situations.

Interventions at Home

■ Teach relaxation techniques

■ Deep Breathing

- Breathe from abdomen
- In through nose, out through mouth
- Slow down exhale
- At least 10-15 at a time
- Say a relaxing word during exhale

Interventions in the Home

■ Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Tense and then relax one muscle group at a time
- Focus on sensations of tension and relaxation
- Raises awareness of signs of rising tension, so that you may intervene earlier
- Goal is to learn how to let go of tension

Interventions at Home

- **Plan for transitions** (going to school, substitute teacher, changing classes, separation from caregiver, taking a test)
- **Encourage the child's participation in activities they fear** (Helping the child or adolescent to get through social fears)
- **Model and reward brave, non-anxious behavior. "Anxiety is catching"**

Interventions at Home

- **Suggest moving forward in small steps that allow the child to build upon successful social encounters.** (Successfully navigating meeting with one or two preferred friends may be a good goal to work toward before attempting to attend a large birthday party)
- **Firmly, consistently, and caringly set limits .**
(I know you'd like Mommy to bring you to bed, and I know this is hard for you. Mommy said good night and she'll see you first thing in the morning, and you'll make breakfast together)

Inventions in the Home

- Share your own experiences
- Push a little harder
- Empathize
- **Ask about your child's fears:** Anxious children often harbor questionable ideas about how others perceive them or how friendships are "supposed to be." Find out what these beliefs are and encourage your child to challenge

Stress vs. Anxiety: Working with a stressed kid

- The way parents respond to emotional situations significantly affects how well children learn to cope with their emotions.
- The first step to reducing stress is helping your child become aware of when he/she is experiencing stress.
- Relaxation techniques: yoga, music, breathing
- Regular exercise, hobbies, or social "fun"

Treating Anxiety Beyond the Home

Medication

- SSRI's



Therapy

- Examining thinking and feelings
- Education
- Involving parents and schools
- Homework
- Facing fears
- Therapist as a coach

CBT + DCS for Social Anxiety

- 12 sessions
- Session 1 & 2: explanation of treatment, planning exposure hierarchy
- Sessions 3-12: Social skills training and social exposure sessions
- Pill taken 1-2 hrs prior to exposure sessions
- Three month post-treatment follow up

NIMH Current Studies

- Thorough evaluation & Participation provided free of charge. Travel reimbursement available.
- Children Ages 8-17
- Participation Includes:
 - Medical evaluations
 - Psychotherapy or treatment medication (Outpatient visits over 8 weeks)
- Participants must:
 - Be medically healthy
 - Not be taking any psychiatric medications

NIMH Contact Information

<http://patientinfo.nimh.nih.gov>

OR

301-435-1196

OR

301-496-6642

Resources

- www.abct.org
- <http://www.aboutourkids.org/families>
- <http://patientinfo.nimh.nih.gov>
- <http://www.academyofct.org>
- **Freeing Your Child from Anxiety**
Written by Tamar Chansky, Ph.D.
- **Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-By-Step Guide for Parents**
Written by Sue Spence, Vanessa Cobham, Ann Wignall, Ronald M. Rapee

Thank You

- Please take a moment to complete the evaluation form provided, your input is appreciated
